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INTERPRETATION OF THE SMITH-LEVER ACT

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Washington, D. C.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SMITH-LEVER ACT*

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It is a privilege to meet the members of the Extension Section of the American Home Economics Association and to discuss with you the interpretation of the Smith-Lever Act. I assume that what is desired is a discussion of the field of the extension worker as distinguished from other groups, with particular reference to home economics. My knowledge of home-economics subject matter is so limited that perhaps it will be wiser for me, for the most part, to discuss the extension field in general rather than to discuss home-economics extension specifically.

While I admit I don't know home economics, I think I do know something of home economists. I claim, because of that knowledge, to have saved the official - perhaps also the personal - scalp of one of the able and efficient officers of the American Home Economics Association. Last winter Miss Alice Edwards and I discussed certain proposed legislation at a hearing before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. The bill was the Capper-Ketcham Bill to provide additional Federal support for extension work. Later, when the clerk of the committee asked me to read and correct my testimony, I glanced over the transcript of the statements of other witnesses as well. Needless to say, I was astonished to read the reporter's version of Miss Edwards' opening sentence - "I represent 8,500 plain home economists." I think Miss Edwards owes me some-

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thing for changing that word "plain" to what she actually said -- "trained."

But we were to talk about home-economics extension work, not home economists. In interpreting any law the administrators and the courts take into account not only the language of the law but the background of events which led up to its enactment and the discussion in the hearings and on the floor of the legislative bodies which enacted it. For that reason, I have gone rather at length into the history and development of extension work and the views of some of the early advocates and exponents.

Extension work, as we now know it, had its beginnings in the fight on the cotton boll weevil begun by Dr. Seaman A. Knapp in Texas in 1904, the 25th anniversary of which is to be celebrated at Houston in February, 1929. The early extension work was entirely with adult farmers. Doctor Knapp and his associates, one of whom was J. A. Evans, now assistant chief of the Office of Cooperative Extension Work and the dean of all extension employees in length of service, soon realized, however, that more certain and perhaps more rapid progress was to be made by training the boys than those whose habits and prejudices were more firmly fixed. Very early, therefore, boys' clubs were organized, corn clubs at first, with various other projects added as the work progressed.

In 1910, the first girls' club was organized, the organizer being Miss Marie Cromer of Aiken County, S. C. Miss Cromer was a school teacher who, after hearing a talk by a representative of the Department of Agriculture on boys' club work, decided to organize girls' clubs in her county. The first club work for girls was the growing and canning of a tenth-acre of tomatoes. Agents were employed for the organization and training of girls' clubs, and from this work soon developed a demand from farm women for help on their problems. The first home demonstration work for women was done in 1912 or 1913.

Extension work was given considerable impetus in 1909 and 1910 by the report of the Country Life Commission, appointed in August, 1908, by President Roosevelt. I think it is worth while to review here the personnel of the commission and to quote a paragraph from their report. We are apt to forget the part which this group of men played in bringing forcibly to public notice many of the forward movements which were crystallized into law in the succeeding years.

The chairman of the commission was Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell University. Associated with him were the late Henry Wallace, editor and founder of Wallaces' Farmer of this city; Kenyon L. Butterfield, then president of the Massachusetts Agricultural College; Gifford Pinchot, then at the head of the United States Forest Service, close personal friend of President Roosevelt and later Governor of Pennsylvania; the late Walter H. Page, then editor of World's Work and later our very able and successful ambassador to Great Britain during the World War; Charles S. Barrett of Georgia, long president of the Farmers' Union, and William A. Beard of California.

This commission held a series of hearings late in 1908 at many widely separated points, and consulted with many persons interested in rural betterment. Among the remedies suggested by them were the establishment of a system of extension work through the land-grant colleges, of a highway engineering system, and of a system of parcel post and postal savings banks. A thorough-going survey of all agricultural regions to provide a basis on which to develop a sound country life, a study of the middleman system of handling farm products, and an inquiry into the control and use of streams were also recommended.

With reference to extension work the commission said:

"Each State college of agriculture should be empowered to organize as soon as practicable, a complete department of college extension, so managed as to reach every person on the land in the State, with both information and inspiration. The work should include such forms of extension teaching as lectures, bulletins, reading-courses, correspondence courses, demonstration and other means of reaching the people at home and on their farms. It should be designed to forward not only the business of agriculture, but sanitation, education, home-making, and all interests of country life."

The success of the demonstration work in the South, the report of the Country Life Commission, and other factors caused the introduction into Congress of several bills to provide for Federal aid for extension work. At the same time, bills were introduced for Federal aid for the teaching of vocational agriculture and other subjects, some of the bills providing for both extension and vocational teaching. As extension work developed in the South, high-school teaching of agriculture and home economics developed in some of the northern States, particularly Minnesota. A prominent figure in this movement was Willet M. Hays, dean of the college of agriculture in Minnesota, and later assistant secretary in the Federal Department of Agriculture. After prolonged discussion, the two projects were separated in legislation, and Federal aid for extension was provided in the Smith-Lever Act, approved May 8, 1914. Federal aid for the teaching of vocational agriculture, trades and industry, and home economics was provided in the Smith-Hughes Act, approved February 23, 1917. Both laws bear the name of Smith -- Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia, then chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. Asbury F. Lever of South Carolina was chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, and Dudley M. Hughes of Georgia, of the House Committee on Education. In the minds of the authors of the two bills, and of their proponents, it was very clear that two separate and distinct lines of work were planned, and considerable thought has been given to their interpretation.

The Smith-Lever Act states that -

"Cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting to such persons information on said subjects through field demonstrations, publications, and otherwise."

Note the essentials: Giving instruction and practical demonstrations to persons not attending said colleges (i.e. the colleges of agriculture) and imparting to such persons information on agriculture and home economics. In the beginning the sky was practically the limit of the field of the extension worker, as long as he did not attempt to teach those resident at the agricultural college. There was nothing in the law to prevent him from giving his instruction in the school room if he chose, but extension leadership wisely made the field and the home the extension worker's classroom. When Congress provided Federal aid for vocational teaching of agriculture and home economics, that act very properly was considered as limiting the field of the extension workers in the schools, where vocational teachers provided regularly organized class room instruction.

Going now to some of the early statements regarding home economics extension to provide the ground work for interpretation of the Smith-Lever Act, I quote from an address of Dr. Seaman A. Knapp at the State Teachers' Association in South Carolina in 1907:

"If much can be done for boys to interest and instruct them in their life work, more can be done for girls. Teach them to mend and sew and cook; **how to doctor**; how to dress wound or make a ligature; how to adorn the simple home and make it appear like a palace; how by a simple arrangement the environment of the home can be transformed into a place of beauty. In the United States the art of cooking is mainly a lost art. There are communities where not to be dyspeptic is to be out of fashion. If we could have some lessons on how to live royally on a little; how to nourish the body without poisoning the stomach; and how to balance a ration for economic and healthful results, there would be a hopeful gain in lessening the number of bankrupts by the kitchen route."

In the report of the Country Life Commission, the desirable things for rural women were stated to be:

"The relief to farm women must come through a general elevation of country living. The women must have more helps. In particular, these matters may be mentioned; development of a cooperative spirit in the home; simplification of the diet in many cases; the building of convenient and sanitary houses; providing running water in the house, and also more mechanical helps; good and convenient gardens; a less exclusive ideal of money-getting on the part of the farmer; providing better means of communication, as telephones, roads, and reading-circles; and developing of women's organizations. These and other agencies should relieve the women of many of her manual burdens on the one hand, and interest her in outside activities on the other. The farm woman should have sufficient free time and strength so that she may serve the community by participating in its vital affairs."

The Congress of the United States has made provision for Federal aid to both extension work and vocational teaching. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the annual appropriation acts of the Department of Agriculture, and the Capper-Ketcham Act of 1928, all make, or authorize appropriations for extension work. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 provides funds for vocational teaching, and the further interest of Congress in the subject was indicated at the session recently adjourned by the consideration given to the George-Reed Bill to authorize large additional appropriations for the teaching of agriculture and home economics. This bill was passed by the Senate without a dissenting vote, and was favorably reported by the House Committee on Education, but did not come to a vote in the House. It will no doubt receive further attention next winter. The repeated action of Congress in providing for both lines of work is, I believe, a clear indication that in the opinion of Congress there is need for both, that they do not seriously conflict or overlap, but rather that each rounds out and complements the other.

The respective fields of the Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes workers have been well stated in a letter from Hon. Dudley M. Hughes, co-author of the Smith-Hughes Act, to President Sikes of Clemson College, written in 1925:

"The primary aid of vocational training is to give the boys and girls systematic training in the schools as a part of the regular curriculum, and to fit them for the particular vocation in which training is given. The primary aim of the extension work is to strengthen the field service, give demonstrations to farmers and to instruct large groups of rural people with new research information from the State colleges and Government."

After the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, considerable attention was given by the administrative staffs of the Federal Board for Vocational Education and the States Relations Service of the Department of Agriculture to the question of relationships and respective fields of work. A memorandum was prepared and signed February 15, 1918, which related particularly to agriculture but which was intended to cover home economics as well. In this memorandum it is stated:

"As the extension system becomes general and settles down in any community, it deals more and more with special problems of the farm and rural community rather than with the details of practice with which the farming people are generally familiar. Backed by the research system of agricultural colleges and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, it brings to the people the new things which have been found worthy of broad trial in actual practice."

The memorandum suggested that in each State the director of extension and the executive officer of the State Board for Vocational Education confer and agree on a plan of cooperation for the State, based on certain general policies and principles. These were:

(1) Administration of all extension work by director of extension and of vocational education by those in charge of vocational schools.

(2) Extension work with adults done by teachers to be in accordance with plans of the State extension system and in cooperation with county extension agent.

(3) Cooperation between teachers and extension agents in extension work with young people, including cooperative agreement between extension authorities and school authorities in the county for participation of teachers in such extension work.

(4) Avoidance of duplication and overlapping of work supported by Federal funds.

The annual meetings of the agricultural section of the National Society for Vocational Education and the Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association in 1920, voted independently to appoint committees to consider Smith-Hughes and Smith-Lever relationships. Later, the committee of the National Society for Vocational Education was asked to represent the N. E. A. as well. A preliminary report was made in February, 1921, and the Association of Land-Grant Colleges was asked to appoint a committee to confer with representatives of the two organizations first named. It was then learned that a committee representing the Association for the Advancement of Agricultural Teaching was studying the same subject. All these committees met together in Chicago, May 9 and 10, 1921.

Taking the joint memorandum of the Department of Agriculture and the Federal Board for Vocational Agriculture just quoted as their starting point, they materially amplified it in their report. While this memorandum is a helpful and in many respects a useful document, it has no especial official standing, as neither of the respective Federal agencies administering the extension and vocational funds was a party to its preparation.

I think it may be well to mention that just now, at the suggestion of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, on motion of the Secretary of Agriculture, who is a member of the Board ex-officio, representatives of the Board and of the Department are trying to work out a memorandum of understanding and statement of relationships between the extension and vocational forces which we hope will clearly define the two fields and interpret the basic acts.

As yet, consideration has been limited principally to the agricultural phases of the two activities, but later I expect that home economics will be taken up. It is the expectation that this statement will be presented to the extension and vocational groups at their next annual meetings. As it is yet incomplete and in process of change I will not quote from it here.

Based on the ideas of those who drafted the Smith-Lever Act, the interpretations of those who have administered it, and the practice of those who are putting it into effect, extension work is perhaps best defined alliteratively as informational and inspirational itinerant instruction. The practical nature of extension teaching is emphasized in the law by the specific mention of demonstrations as one of the methods. It is the application of scientific principles and practical information to the problems of every day life on the farm and in the rural home. The thing to do is to help the housewife to learn how to can and preserve vegetables and fruits, to feed her family better, to clothe herself more tastefully or economically. If she learns the scientific principles that govern successful canning, well and good, but the essential thing is for her to learn to do the job - and to be so enthusiastic about it that she imparts her information to others. Extension work begins with the particular, but may extend to the general; scholastic instruction usually teaches principles first, and later may extend to their application.

The aim of all extension work should be toward better, happier, more comfortable homes. Whether this is brought about by improvement and stabilization of the farmer's economic position, by bringing new information and new viewpoints to the farmer's wife, or by the training of his boys and girls in 4-H clubs, this aim should always be kept in mind. Improvement of rural life is the real object of the Smith-Lever Act and in our interpretation of it we should always have that object in view.



